

Promoting Diversity to Youth at Turning Point in Nepal's History

A window of opportunity for building democracy and achieving sustainable peace has opened since November 2006 in Nepal, as the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists have signed several agreements, bringing an end to 11 years of armed conflict.



The fragile nature of the transition phase, however, has been evident in the recent wave of violent demonstrations that claimed more than 30 lives in the southeastern plains of Nepal in February. With ethnic groups in other areas of the country also starting to protest, ethnic tensions threaten to derail the peace process. In light of these tensions, it is essential to celebrate Nepal's diversity and emphasize the need for communal harmony as the country works toward a sustainable peace.

On February 17, 2007, with USAID/OTI assistance, the two-time Grammy Award winning American band Ozomatli performed for the first time in Nepal. The theme of the concert was "Different Instruments but One Rhythm-Together We Can Make a Prosperous Nepal," and the band members, who are politically conscious and come from a number of ethnic backgrounds, proved to be the perfect ambassadors for advocating peace and harmony.

The concert was staged in the Khula Manch in central Kathmandu, a place renowned for its role in democratic movements and protests. The venue was symbolic: only days before, indigenous ethnic groups had demonstrated in the area, burning tires and bringing traffic to a halt. It is also the place where last year Maoist leader Prachanda publicly addressed tens of thousands after being underground for 25 years. More than 12,000 people from all walks of life gathered peacefully for the group's performance. Ozomatli's music and message resonated with the participants, who danced and jumped throughout the concert.

The band also devoted time to conducting outreach activities around the city, visiting the Umbrella Foundation's Sagarmatha Orphanage, which serves child victims and orphans of the conflict; attending a workshop for local musicians and students; and holding an open discussion with youth leaders on peaceful methods of achieving social and political change.

The concert was broadcast live on national television and received extensive coverage on various radio stations and in the print media. The event was jointly organized by the American Center and USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) with the intention of fostering communal harmony.